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SUBJECT: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DEBATE CONTINUES IN BRAZIL

REF: A) 04 Sao Paulo 843

B) 04 Sao Paulo 789

C) 03 Rio 823

1. (U) Summary: On June 10-11, government officials, non-profit organizations, educators, interested citizens, and representatives from 20 public Brazilian universities met in Sao Paulo for a two-day nation-wide conference to discuss nascent affirmative action programs in higher education. Many programs in Brazil include specific quotas for students graduating from public high schools, who typically are dramatically underrepresented in elite Brazilian public universities. Debate on viable ways of creating equity in the education system continues in Brazil. Although many attendees were optimistic about the academic success of students admitted under quota programs, some activist groups are not pleased about delays in implementation of government mandated affirmative action requirements currently under debate. The Conference themes went beyond university policy and included cultural performances, health awareness and community building. End Summary

FOCUS ON QUOTA PROGRAMS

2. (U) The Office for Coordination of Black Affairs of the City of Sao Paulo (CONE) organized the two-day conference held in one of Sao Paulo's major convention centers. The conference received not only the support of the GOB and the State of Sao Paulo, but also support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), private companies and educational institutions. University representatives from distant states were flown in for the event to present information on affirmative action programs in place at their institutions. Universities from the five states in Sao Paulo's consular district were represented: the Federal University of Sao Paulo's School of Medicine, the State University of Campinas (State of Sao Paulo), the State University of Santa Catarina, the Federal University of Parana, the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul, and the State University of Rio Grande do Sul. Many affirmative action programs in Brazil specifically target graduates of the public school system, regardless of racial or ethnic background. Public school students of all races are underrepresented in the elite public universities. In a recent meeting with Poloff, Mario Luiz Cortes, head of CONE, stated that the location of Sao Paulo for this nationwide conference had symbolic value. He said that the University of Sao Paulo (USP), a very large and prestigious public university located in the city, has resisted the implementation of affirmative action measures, and CONE wished to bring administrators from universities from all over Brazil to the city in this well-publicized and sponsored event.

AN UNEQUAL SYSTEM

3. (U) Significantly, all the universities involved in the Conference were public universities, traditionally the "elites" of higher education in Brazil. The private and public education systems have historically been very unequal. Public elementary/secondary schools suffer from a lack of resources, high classroom enrollment and low teacher salaries. Few middle or upper-middle class families choose to send their children to public elementary and secondary schools if they can afford private school tuition. In contrast, public universities are well funded, have very competitive entrance exams, offer excellent programs, and award prestigious degrees to their graduates. Furthermore, tuition at public universities is free or extremely low cost. For example, the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) charges approximately 150 Reals (USD 61) per semester for tuition and fees. Dormitory housing at UFMG costs about USD 105 per month. Graduates of public high schools in Brazil are frequently unprepared to pass the difficult entrance exams to these elite public universities. These students must pay high private university tuition or not attend college at all. The Education Ministry estimates

that 16 percent of all university students are Afro-Brazilian. AfroBras, the Afro-Brazilian advocacy NGO, estimates only 3 to 7 percent of students in public universities are Afro-Brazilian.

POSITIVE VIEW FROM SOME UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

14. (U) Some university affirmative action administrators are optimistic about the ultimate academic success of students who entered under quota systems. The coordinator of affirmative action at the Federal University of Sao Paulo (UNIFESP), Marcos Ferraz, remarked that despite differences in family income, computer ownership, and internet access in the home, the academic performance of quota students is "similar" to that of non-quota students at UNIFESP and he is confident about the success of quota-based students as they pass through the university course. In the School of Medicine, the difference in the grades of the best quota based student and the best student who entered under the traditional system was ten points (on a scale of 100). (Note: Absolute scores are unavailable. End Note.) Ferraz acknowledged that quota-based students needed assistance from the university -- generally in the form of computer access and scholarships, but he is ultimately confident of their success in the normal course of studies. The average monthly family income for students who enter UNIFESP as beneficiaries of the quota system is approximately USD 720, as compared to an average family monthly income of USD 1,600 for students who enter under the regular admissions process. Computer ownership and Internet access rates are also dissimilar. 62 percent of quota beneficiaries own a computer and 48 percent have internet access in their homes, while 93 percent of non-quota students own computers and 88 percent have home internet access.

15. (U) The Federal University of Parana (UFPR) has had affirmative action programs in place since 2002. Under UFPR's program, 20 percent of entrance slots are reserved for Afro-Brazilians and persons of mixed ancestry, and 20 percent are reserved for public high school graduates, regardless of race or ethnicity. The University Rector from UFPR stated that his university supports the separate category for Afro-Brazilian and persons of mixed ancestry because those students, regardless of whether they graduate from public schools or prestigious private ones, experience discrimination and racism in Brazilian society.

DELAYS IN IMPLEMENTATION UPSET HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

16. (U) Brazilian non-profit organizations such as Educafro (Education and Citizenship for Afro-Brazilians and the Needy) and the MSU (Movement of those Without Access to Universities) are pressing for immediate implementation of quota-systems in all public universities. In June, however, GOB Education Minister Tarso Genro addressed an audience of non-profit organizations in Sao Paulo and outlined a proposal that would delay immediate implementation of quotas for federal universities. The proposal would give federal universities until 2015 to implement programs requiring that fifty percent of entering students be graduates of public secondary schools, and would allow each institution to reach the goal in a variety of ways, not necessarily through a quota system. The GOB's earlier proposal requiring immediate implementation of a quota-based system reportedly encountered stiff opposition from many federal university administrators, many of whom believed the plan was not feasible. The affirmative action debate in Brazil has included concerns that students from public schools will not be able to compete in the rigorous public university system, and that lower academic standards will result. (See Reftel A.) Many university administrators feel that institutions should be able to reach equity goals through a variety of methods, such as programs that provide entrance exam preparation, academic assistance, and scholarships to public school students, rather than through mandated quota systems. Human rights and Afro-Brazilian advocacy groups remain adamant that they will not wait ten years for full implementation of affirmative action programs. According to press reports, David Santos, executive director of Educafro, stated that "clearly" the Ministry is "giving in to pressures." The coordinator of MSU stated that, despite the Education Ministry announcement delaying proposed implementation of affirmative action programs in Federal universities, "We will continue to fight." A public forum to debate university affirmative action programs, organized by the Educational and Cultural Commission of Congress, originally planned for April, was postponed; it now appears a scaled-back version of the forum, now billed as a seminar, may take place in August in Brasilia.

MORE THAN JUST QUOTAS

17. (U) The scope of the Sao Paulo event went beyond the

presentation of statistical data on affirmative action programs throughout Brazil. Speakers also addressed Afro-Brazilian consciousness; health issues, particularly HIV/AIDs; and Afro-Brazilian self-support programs. The largely Afro-Brazilian audience included a large number of young adults (senior high school and university students), some of whom apparently attended to fulfill course requirements, as well as public school educators and interested community members.

18. (SBU) Comment: While conferences on affirmative action, such as the Sao Paulo city government sponsored conference in June, shine a useful spotlight on racial and socio-economic inequalities in Brazil, it is not clear how effective they will be in promoting substantive progress. The conference received little press coverage, and from our observation, appeared to reach a limited audience beyond those who were already committed to the implementation of affirmative action programs. Despite the optimism of some public university administrators present at the conference about the initial success of their programs, educational affirmative action programs currently appear to be reaching only a small slice of the socio-economically disadvantaged population. Almost all affirmative action advocacy efforts have been focused on the implementation of controversial quotas for racially disadvantaged groups and public school students, with little focus on expanding opportunities for quality public school education at the primary and secondary level. End Comment.

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